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Assessing the Efficacy of a Modified Therapeutic Community on the Reduction of Institutional Write-Ups in a Medium Security Prison

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This study explored the impact a modified TC (Therapeutic Community) had on reducing institutional disorder as documented by institutional write-ups. The number of institutional write-ups exhibited by clients participating in a modified TC was compared with the number of write-ups exhibited by inmates in five non-treatment units over a four-year period. ANOVA (analysis of variance) revealed that the number of write-ups exhibited by clients in the TC was significantly lower than the number exhibited by inmates in the other five dorms ($F_{(4, 24)} = 5.61, p < 0.002$). Further, when examined by category of offense (major/minor), it was found that the write-ups of clients in the TC generally were not as severe as those exhibited by inmates in the general prison population. The implications of these findings for corrections administrators are discussed and specific recommendations are provided.

Keywords: prison, corrections TC (Therapeutic Community), rehabilitation, institutional write-ups, recidivism

Introduction

The USA incarcerates more people than any other country in the world. That includes China, which has a much greater population than the USA. Kentucky's prison population jumped more than 260% from 5,700 inmates in 1985 to more than 20,700 in 2010; i.e., one in every 92 adults in the state of Kentucky was in prison (Pew Center on the States, 2010). In addition to legislators wanting to make even more budget cuts, and overworked, underpaid staff, prison management is also dealing with increased numbers of substance abusers being sent to prison (Bahr, Masters, & Taylor, 2012; Collica, 2012). Correction administrators are charged with the safety and security of the public and for the inmates placed in their care by the Kentucky DOC (Department of Corrections). The success of these administrators is built on their ability to maintain an orderly, secure, and safe institution (Stohr, Hemmens, Collins, Iannacchione, Hudson, & Johnson, 2012). Institutional disorder, in the form of write-ups, threatens all three of these mandates. The ARCH (Addiction Recovery and Commitment To Healing) and TC (Therapeutic Community) program present a treatment approach that addresses all three of these issues while maintaining its focus upon substance abuse treatment (Sun, 2012).

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Given the state's budget problems, efforts of state legislators are focused on passing new laws for individuals arrested for alcohol and drug related crimes (Commonwealth of Kentucky DOC, 2010; Hogan, Lausche, & Keller, 2004). The TC model in prison settings can be an effective strategy in the ongoing efforts to combat recidivism, thus reducing costs (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2006; Griffith, Hiller, Knight, & Simpson, 1999). TC programs maintain that substance abuse problems are a disorder of the whole person requiring the use of long-term treatment in order to make changes in a person's identity and lifestyle (Sun, 2012; Burdon, Farabee, Prendergast, Messina, & Cartier, 2002). Several studies describing the psychological and social benefits of TC programs support this perspective (e.g., De Leon, 1995; 1999). Specifically, De Leon and Wexler (2009) noted that "In addition to their substance abuse and social deviancy, drug abusers who enter TCs reveal a considerable degree of psychological disability, which is further confirmed in diagnostic studies" (p. 168).

The ARCH Modified TC

The ARCH TC program located at the GRCC (Green River Correctional Complex), in central city, Kentucky, is a 960 bed medium security male prison. The program was originally funded with money from a federal grant and supplemented with state general funds through the Kentucky Justice Cabinet. After 2004, the federal grant was exhausted and the funding for the program was provided with state money. The primary focus of the new program was to provide an intensive residential substance abuse treatment program for the adult males in the prison (Alexander & West, 2012). The TC program began as, and continues to be, a modified TC, which means that the program was not totally segregated from general population inmates (i.e., canteen, weight pile and gym access, and dining room access). Also, modifications were made to the dorm that housed the program; these included the addition of offices, phone lines, and computer access. GRCC was never intended to house a TC treatment program; in fact, none of the prisons in Kentucky was originally designed with any intention other than housing, feeding, and meeting the minimal recreational needs of those incarcerated there (Hogan, Lausche, & Keller, 2004). The TC program which is the focus of this study is located in Building D on the prison campus. Specifically, it is located in Dorm 3 of that building. Dorm 3 is a 128 bed facility—a two-tier structure with 32 rooms on the upper walk and 32 on the lower walk. Two inmates share each "cell". Dorm 3 was originally designed to be the honor dorm housing one inmate per room. As such, the cells in Dorm 3 are substantially smaller than any of the others in the prison. It should be noted that Dorm 3 has never actually been used as the honor dorm due to a mandate from DOC to double bunk all inmates at GRCC.

The double-bunking requirement has been an ongoing problem for GRCC in its ACA (American corrections accreditation) audits. The ACA is the national organization that sets "standards" for operations of prisons; over 80% of state and federal prisons are members (Taxman & Belenko, 2012). Audits are conducted every three years. Prisons who maintain their accreditation through the ACA are viewed as exceeding the minimum requirements as set forth in state laws. GRCC has had to continually be granted an "exemption" for this when the ACA does its audits. This makes the best possible score that GRCC can make a 98%. The honor dorm is also located in Building D, Dorm 2. Dorm 2 Houses 64 inmates who meet the criteria for honor status. This includes good behavior and completion of assigned programs. The honor dorm inmates receive a number of special privileges. It is interesting to note that TC clients, in the ARCH program, are eligible to be admitted to the honor dorm, and do get on the waiting list for this dorm. However, they do not get selected due because they are in the TC program. Dorm 3, like all of the facilities at GRCC, is designed on an "open dorm" concept.

The officer's station is located in the center of each dorm which gives the CO (correction officer) easy access to all areas. This arrangement allows the CO to observe and interact freely with the inmates in the dorm, but it also necessitates a higher skill level. In most of the other prisons in Kentucky, COs are more segregated from the inmates. The CO is usually the only staff person in the dorm for extended periods of time and this is especially true during institutional "count times".

The Cardinal Rules and the Kentucky Department of Corrections Institutional Write-Up System

The Cardinal Rules are major program norms which, if a client is caught breaking, can be grounds for immediate discharge. One client, chosen at random from the community, reads them aloud in front of everyone. The Cardinal Rules of the ARCH TC program at GRCC are:

(1) Three unexcused absences from any scheduled TC activity will result in an institutional write-up and/or other sanctions;

(2) No physical violence, threats of physical violence, or intimidation against any person;

(3) No stealing or gambling;

(4) No drugs, alcohol, or drug/alcohol paraphernalia, as defined by institutional rules;

(5) No refusal to participate in any assigned activity;

(6) A failed field test drug screen will result in an immediate mandatory institutional drug screen. If positive, the client will receive an institutional write-up and dismissal from the program;

(7) If a client is sent to the SMU (special management unit), resulting in disciplinary segregation times assigned, he will be discharged from the program;

(8) Anyone breaking confidentiality will be immediately discharged from the TC program.

When an inmate violates an institutional rule, or breaks the conduct code, he typically receives an institutional write-up. CPP (corrections policies and procedures) require that the write-up be issued as a means of maintaining security, safety and to deter the behavior from recurring. The institutional write-up system works in tandem with the TC sanction system; it supports and reinforces the core TC community values. When a TC client is given a write-up by the institution, he is also given a TC sanction by the program, for the same offense, as delineated above. This procedure can seem unfair to the TC client, but it must be kept in mind that TC clients are held to a higher standard than general population inmates. Tomry (as cited in Burdon, Farabee, Prendergast, Messina, & Cartier, 2002) stated that it is important for protocols to be established and followed by treatment and correction staff. This is especially true when assessing infractions and applying sanctions, in order to eliminate the disparities that are inherent in the two systems.

The institutional write-up system consists of seven categories of offenses. Each category has a number of violations that are grouped together because they are similar in their severity. Categories 1 and 2 are minor violations (e.g., Category 1.6 is improper or unauthorized use of a telephone, Category 2.2 is disruptive behavior). Each category is also assigned a minimum and maximum penalty (e.g., Category 1.6 minimum penalty of one and maximum penalty of four, Category 2.2 minimum penalty of two and maximum of five).

When a staff member issues a write-up, it is entered into the KOMS (Kentucky offender management system) computer system on an institutional disciplinary form. Once, it has been placed in the offender's file which can be reviewed by anyone in the DOC, including the PO (probation officer). The write-up is then assigned to an investigating officer. An investigation officer is usually a sergeant or lieutenant grade corrections

officer who has received training in adjustment procedures. The investigation officer then investigates the incident, interviewing the inmate/client and any witnesses. This investigation is to gather the facts of the write-up and determine if it was in fact a violation of an institutional rule or code of conduct. If the write-up is deemed to be valid, and it is a minor offense, the investigating officer can make the decision to refer it as a “unit citation”, or send it to the institutional AO (adjustment officer) for a final decision.

When an institutional write-up is deemed valid by the AO, it is put on a schedule to be “heard” by the AO. The AO then hears the write-up case and adjudicates guilt. The process is much like a trial and a lawyer or legal aide can represent the inmate. Legal aides are inmates who receive special training in CPP policy and in how to represent inmates at adjustment hearings. Again, a sanction will be applied from CPP 15.2-F. The outcomes of these hearings are then stored in the institutional adjustment hearings file. The data for this study were reviewed from the institutional adjustment hearing files. Access to these files was granted by the warden of GRCC, who has ultimate authority of inmate files at this institution.

Population and Sample

The population, for this study, consisted of clients in the TC program (Dorm 3) over a four-year period and inmates from the general population living in Dorms 1, 4, 5, and 8 during the same timeframe. The median age for the TC clients was 30 years. The median age for the general population Dorms 1, 4, 5, and 8 inmates was 28 years. The median sentence for the TC clients was 11 years, while the median sentence for the general population Dorms 1, 4, 5, and 8 inmates was 16 years. The ARCH TC clients were 65% Caucasian, 34% Black, and 1% other. The general population inmates in Dorms 1, 4, 5, and 8 were 62% Caucasian, 37% Black, and 1% other. Dorms 1, 4, 5, and 8 were selected as the control group for this study. Collectively, these four dorms were called the control group for the purposes of this study. It should also be noted that all participants were males who met the requirements for classification as medium custody level inmates. As Table 1 illustrates, the participants were closely related in terms of age and race. The difference in median sentence was due to the fact that all the TC clients must be within 12 months of meeting with the parole board. Dorm 4 is also the intake dorm where all inmates coming into the prison are first housed.

Table 1

Demographics of Participants

	Male	Median age	Median sentence	Caucasian	Black	Other
ARCH TC	100%	30	11	65%	34%	1%
Control group	100%	28	16	62%	37%	1%

Dorm 2 was also not selected to be used in this study. This is the “honor” dorm for the institution. Inmates housed in this dorm have longer sentences, with an average of 25 years. All inmates in this dorm work for the corrections industry which pays them an hourly wage. All other inmates receive a daily stipend. The rate of pay for the TC clients is 0.80 per day. This dorm also only has 64 beds and the turnover rate is 18 months on average. The median age for inmates in Dorm 2 is 37 years.

The clients in the ARCH TC program were screened to meet DSM-IV-TR (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition) criteria for substance dependency only. No attempt was made to screen the TC clients as to any severity of crime, previous institutional history, antisocial behavior, or any other psychopathology. As previously noted, the ARCH TC clients are housed in Dorm 3. The average length of stay

in the treatment program was 10.5 months. The control group inmates are housed in dormitories that are similar to the ARCH TC client's dorm. Each dorm houses 128 males, with two inmates to a cell. The control group inmates were randomly assigned by the UAs (unit administrators), to live in these dormitories. The inmates from the control groups could request a cell mate but the UAs have the final approval. Once inmates decided to room together, and were approved by staff, they signed a contract to stay in together for at least six months. The average length of stay for inmates in the control group was 6.8 months. No attempt was made to screen the control group inmates as to severity of crime, previous institutional history, antisocial behavior, or any other psychopathology. All of the dorms are essentially identical to the TC Dorm. None of the inmates in the control group were in any type of substance abuse treatment program and none had previously completed a TC program.

Data Collection and Results

The data utilized in the current study were obtained from existing records kept by the AO relevant to institutional write-ups at GRCC. Individual adjustment hearing results were kept on computer files locked in the AO at the prison. Access to these files is only open to staff upon request to the AO. The researcher examined individual adjustment hearing results and information was tabulated as to the category and final disposition of each write-up. All data collected were maintained anonymously.

As noted previously, the primary method used to determine if the presence of a TC program which reduces institutional write-ups was to examine the adjustment hearing results for all the dorms. The write-ups are segregated into seven categories with Categories 1-3 considering minor offenses and Categories 4-7 considering major offenses. The results of the distribution of documented institutional write-ups are given in Table 2.

Table 2

Distribution of Institutional Write-Ups by Dorm

Category of write-up	Dorm 3 (TC)	Dorm 1	Dorm 4	Dorm 5	Dorm 8
Category 1	47	86	75	52	100
Category 2	17	21	42	58	49
Category 3	42	208	215	106	185
Category 4	52	149	167	122	210
Category 5	05	66	41	59	60
Category 6	05	52	69	43	25
Category 7	00	06	02	05	03
Totals	168	588	611	445	632

The mean numbers and standard deviations to complete the ANOVA (analysis of variance) test are represented in Table 3.

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics

Dorm	Mean	Std. deviation	N
d3 (TC)	24.00	22.30	7
d1	84.00	71.89	7
d4	87.29	75.96	7
d5	63.57	39.27	7
d8	90.29	79.48	7

A one-way, category by dorms, repeated measures ANOVA was performed on the data of this study. This statistical test was selected due to the fact that more than two groups of means were being compared. Specifically, when the same participants participate in all the conditions of an experiment, the appropriate statistic to use is the one-way, repeated measures ANOVA (Field, 2009). When this statistical test is used, the effect of the manipulation shows up in the within-participant variance as opposed to the between-group variance. When the experimentation is carried out on the same people, the within-participation variance will include both the individual difference and the effect of the experimental manipulation. Since the experimental manipulation is carried out on everyone within a condition, any variation that is not explained by the manipulation must be due to random factors outside of the control of the experiment and unrelated to the experiment (Field, 2009).

The one-way, category by dorm, repeated measures ANOVA was selected in order to compare several means (5) and those means came from the same participants. The write-ups were treated as the subjects or dependent variable and the dorms as the conditions or groups. In the TC Dorm 3, everyone had fewer write-ups so it is reasonable to assume it did not happen by chance but because the clients were housed in the TC dorm. Table 4 shows the results of the one-way, category by dorms, repeated measures ANOVA test. The results indicate the write-ups for Dorm 3 (TC) were significantly fewer ($F_{(4, 24)} = 5.61, p < 0.002$).

Table 4

ANOVA Summary Table

Source	<i>df</i>	<i>ss</i>	<i>ms</i>	<i>p</i>
Participant	4	21,444.4	5,361.1	0.002
Between	1	170,661.1	15,438.4	0.016
Error	24	22,950.0	956.3	
Total	29	214,055.5	21,755.8	

Post hoc test (see Table 5) revealed Dorm 3 (TC) write-ups were significantly fewer than all of the other control dorms ($p < 0.05$). Taken together, these results suggest the TC program does have a significant effect on the reduction of institutional write-ups at this medium security prison. It can also be noted, according to post hoc tests, that not only the TC dorm was different from all the other dorms, but also that there was no significant difference between any of the other control group Dorms (1, 4, 5, and 8) in the current study.

The effect size formula and computation was ($\eta^2 = MS \text{ between}/MS \text{ error}$) or $21,444.4/22,950.0 = 0.93$. The effect size is the ratio of the means squared between the means error. In this study, the effect size was the amount of observed variance in the number of write-ups (dependent variable) due to living in a particular dorm (independent variable). Therefore, 93% of the variance in the write-ups was due to being in a particular dorm.

The data from the adjustment hearing results were subjected to a one-way, repeated measure ANOVA. This statistical test showed a significant difference existed between the dorms under consideration. The post hoc tests were then conducted to determine which dorm was significantly different. The results indicated the TC dorm was significantly different from the other dorms with respect to institutional write-ups. An effect size was calculated to determine how much of the difference living in the TC dorm, as opposed to living in the other dorms, had on the amount of institutional write-ups. As stated above, this calculation revealed 93% of the variability in the amount of institutional write-ups in the prison was due to the dorm in which the inmate was living.

Table 5

Pairwise Comparisons

(I) Dorm	(J) Dorm	Mean difference (I-J)	Std. error	Sig.
3	1	-60.000	21.419	0.031
	4	-63.286	22.847	0.032
	5	-39.571	9.911	0.007
	8	-66.286	22.847	0.027
1	3	60.000	21.419	0.031
	4	-3.286	6.527	0.633
	5	20.429	16.086	0.251
	8	-6.286	11.678	0.610
4	3	63.286	22.847	0.032
	2	3.286	6.527	0.633
	5	23.714	16.736	0.206
	8	-3.000	11.607	0.805
5	3	39.571	9.911	0.007
	1	-20.429	16.086	0.251
	4	-23.714	16.736	0.206
	8	-26.714	16.693	0.161
8	3	66.286	22.847	0.027
	1	6.286	11.678	0.610
	4	3.000	11.607	0.805
	5	26.714	16.693	0.161

Note. Measure: MEASURE 1

Discussion

The results of this study demonstrate significantly lower rates of institutional write-ups of the clients in the TC treatment program as compared to the inmates in the four non-treatment control groups at GRCC. Moreover, the clients in the TC program had significantly less violent write-ups than the inmates in the four non-treatment control groups at GRCC. One reason for the lower rate of institutional write-ups from the TC clients may be due to the TC sanctioning system. Clients in the TC program are required as part of being in the TC program to challenge and cause a change in each other's negative behavior (Vavrinak & Lunnen, 2012). The use of the tools that are available for a TC client (e.g., pull-up, confrontation group, TPR (treatment review board), and LE (learning experience)) may prevent rule violation behaviors and negative attitudes before they become serious enough to require an institutional write-up. This is what is known in the TC program as "watching over a brother". The TC sanctioning system is more than just a means of applying consequences, it is also a means of reacting to behaviors without the client becoming cynical or defocused from treatment. The use of the TC behavioral tools is the first choice for both clients and staff when dealing with most of the infractions of rules.

Another possible explanation for this lowered rate of institutional write-ups may be due to the correctional staff choosing to use an LE as opposed to an institutional write-up for a rule infraction or negative behavior (De Leon & Wexler, 2009). When a client receives an institutional write-up, a referral is made to the AO and a hearing is scheduled. However, this process may take several weeks before the institutional write-up is adjudicated. Corrections staff understand this rather lengthy delay before the final adjudication is made. By the time, the process has run its course, the impact of any sanction imposed has lost much of its natural

consequence effect; as a result, little connection is made between the actual infraction and consequence (Hanser, Mire, & Braddock, 2010). Most of the consequences for the lower category write-ups involve extra work duty. This extra duty is assigned and kept up with by an officer, causing them more work. Often, the original write-up is adjusted to a lesser level write-up. In many cases, the final class of write-up is nothing like what the actual infraction was. However, the correctional staff can use the TC LE for a behavior problem instead of an institutional write-up.

If the number of LEs was combined with the actual institutional write-ups for the TC clients, it would have increased the total numbers for Dorm 3. Approximately, 30 LEs are turned in each week on clients in the TC program. The use of the LE system by the staff, opposed to using the institutional write-up system accounts for about 10% of the weekly LEs. This would account for 156 LEs over the year. If you added in this number with the number of write-ups the TC program obtained, it would increase the totals significantly. However, the use of LEs is encouraged by the staff; the option is often employed in the TC program for very minor infractions, many of which are not covered in the institutional write-up system. It is also used to helping clients learn to hold each other accountable and in general interact with each other in a pro-social way. It also has the added benefit of reducing a clients' perception that failure leads to punishment. Any TC program that has a low amount of LEs is probably not very healthy. As such, including the LEs with the institutional write-ups was not a part of this study.

Another reason why the TC clients received fewer institutional write-ups could be due to the clients' self-correcting their behaviors before actually being admitted to the program (Vavrinak & Lunnen, 2012). Clients are aware of the TC sanctioning system before they are admitted; it is described in the application for admission. The client is also told if he gets a write-up after he has been accepted into the program, he will have to wait up to six months and then reapply. As a result of this "probationary period" potential clients come into the program with a clean institutional record and with their behavior somewhat modified. To test this possible effect, all of the write-ups earned before admission to the program could be tabulated and compared to the post treatment results.

Finally, a majority of the clients in the TC program were recommended to complete the TC program either by the parole board or by their case manager. Therefore, it may be the threat of failing to complete treatment rather than the effects of the TC program on the reduction of write-ups. However, Prendergast and his colleges (as cited in Dietz, O'Connell, & Scarpitti, 2003) noted "coercive treatment appears to be just as effective as non-coercive treatment at controlling inmate behavior" (p. 221).

Conclusions

Prison-based TC programs have become widely accepted as the most effective form of treatment for inmates with severe substance abuse diagnosis (Hanser, Mire, & Braddock, 2010; Wexler, Blackmore, & Lipton, 1991). As the DOC and correction administrators are faced with budgets and mandates to "do more with less", programs that demonstrate efficiencies while providing mandated treatment will be sought after. Previous research has demonstrated the effectiveness of TC programs in reducing relapse and recidivism (Vavrinak & Lunnen, 2012). As a result, taxpayers, DOC, administrators, and inmates are better served in terms of saved dollars, increased security, and the return of inmates to becoming contributing citizens in society. This study points out an additional benefit to the administrators of the DOC. The TC program is an effective tool for the control and management of inmates within the prison. The reduction of institutional disorder (write-ups)

will save money due to reduced need of staff to investigate and adjudicate the write-ups. More important, because of reduced behavioral problems and the violence that are associated with it, the TC program may save the lives of inmates directly and staff indirectly.

Limitations

The results of the current study should be viewed with caution. Only one TC program was examined. It may be the results of this TC program are unique and are not transferable to other medium security prisons. To control programmatic variables, it may be that another study could be attempted that would include all of the Kentucky DOC TC programs. Including all of the TC programs would increase the population sample and reduce possible sample bias. As mentioned above, the use of LEs only for TC clients could be considered as a limitation in this study. General population inmates are not able to receive LEs for some infractions that the TC clients get. However, TC client behavior that would not be considered as an infraction in the general prison (i.e., slouching in a chair, not having name badge on correctly, or not having uniform ironed) is given a great deal of attention and results in LEs. Therefore, TC clients enjoy the benefits of an LE as opposed to a write-up, but their behavior is held to a higher standard and they receive sanctions for minor behavior infractions that would go unnoticed in the general population.

Another caution is that the clients' behaviors may have changed before treatment. Clients who were given "parole upon completion" would have an additional pressure to conform what is not attributed to the program. Future studies could include the number and type of write-ups the TC clients and control group participants received before they entered treatment. They could then be tracked during treatment to see if this changed. Given the results of the current study, it would appear TC programs have a positive effect on the reduction of institutional write-ups, and therefore, improve the quality of the environment for the clients and DOC staff alike. Costs reductions, in terms of added personnel, repair to possible damage to state property, and medical treatment from violent acts as results of inmate disorder may be realized. These benefits are attractive to the administrators, clients, and taxpayers of the state of Kentucky.

Recommendations

It is important to note other benefits of a TC program applied beyond prison-based TC programs. These should be considered in any new initiative or planned expansion of existing substance abuse treatment programs. The application of the concept of inmates holding each other accountable for their behavior and their involvement in the operations of the dorm may cause reductions in write-ups similar to those in the TC program. According to De Leon (2000), "The essential elements of the TC resonate the ideals of good society, the values of right living, the obligation to be role models, the power of self-help, and the use of community as method to facilitate individual growth" (p. 393). It is in these ways that TC programs can enhance the quality of life for an individual while they are incarcerated.

Increasing the safety and security of inmates and staff, while at the same time maintaining the protection of society, is the primary goal of the correctional system. The TC program has demonstrated it can have a significant impact on meeting this goal. This study took a "sample" of the population of TC programs. In order to generalize these findings, it is recommended that the same data be collected from several medium security prisons. By increasing the sample size and including more general population dorms, the results would increase the confidence that TC programs have a positive effect upon the reduction of institutional write-ups.

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